Review
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or germinated into colonies of various mossy growths born from the sea's juices having infiltrated the ark's body and married the pages within it—into your hands, kind reader, and from there into your marveling eye, which will be captured, as it must be, in Eakins' fabulous cosmogeny.

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Little Red Riding Hood in the Red Light District. *By Manlio Argueta. Translated by Edward Waters Hood. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1998. Translator's note + 237 pp.*

Jack Zipes (1983) has led us through the "trials and tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood," illustrating the ways in which the tale of LRRH lends itself particularly well to a broad range of social and political agendas. Manlio Argueta's *Little Red Riding Hood in the Red Light District* (*Caperucita en la Zona Roja* [1977]), set in El Salvador in the mid-1970s, interweaves strands of the fairy tale with other narrative genres and further extends the political utility of the fairy-tale allusion to the Central American novel.

Argueta's novel exemplifies some of the key elements of the Central American postmodern, postcolonial novel, which, in its radically nonnovelistic form, pushes the conventional sense of the modern, western genre. Juxtaposing and jumbling the apparent veracity of personal testimonies (*testimonio*) with the fiction of the fairy tale, Argueta consciously questions the absolute transparency of both in a destabilizing form that shatters linear time, the stability of place, and the singularity of voice.

While "revolving" around the relationship between Hormiga (aka Ant, Little Red Riding Hood) and Alfonso (wolf), there is, paradoxically, no center to the text. The very subject and the narrative voice of the novel are decentered in a constant rearranging of the first, second, and third person, sometimes within a single paragraph. The identities of key characters are similarly unstable: although initially introduced as "the wolf," Alfonso often denies the association directly ("I'm not a wolf" [9]), and also implicitly through his frequent refusals to eat. Ant, Little Red, on the other hand, assumes the wolf identity: "she throws herself on my lap baring her teeth and threatening me with her hands in the shape of claws, I'm going to eat you up" (16). Argueta explores the central trope of the fairy tale—consuming and devouring—as a metaphor for simultaneously invigorating and destructive love/sex relationships. Ant and Alfonso spend a lot of time in the course of the book eating and being fed both food and each other, and also, of course, in sexual activity, which is never uncoupled from eating (nor is defecation: "Food is shit backwards" [19], Alfonso muses on a number of occasions). The voices and the bodies of Ant and Alfonso thus dissolve into one another as Argueta plays on the

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unity and identity of Red Riding Hood and the wolf and their shifting, unstable subjectivities.

The political permeates most Central American novels, and for Argueta the political is always personal. He draws us into the lives of Ant and Alfonso, and allegorically links their dysfunctional love relationship to the pathological El Salvadoran national body, and, by extension, one could surmise that the struggle for a healthy relationship could be the mirrored image of the struggle for a healthy nation. Similarly, the power struggle between Ant and Alfonso, with Ant resisting the inertial weight of Al's machismo, reflects, on a national level, the resistance of the (effeminized) students and intellectuals in the face of the oppressive clout of the US-backed oligarchy.

Incorporation, penetration, embodiment and disembodiment, consumption, and destruction through the literal and symbolic eradication of self serve as powerful metaphors for the repressive regime of the El Salvadoran military oligarchy and their reign of terror against the people of El Salvador which is enacted in the *zona roja* ("the red light district"). In this larger context, the wolves sometimes are the police, as made clear in this remarkable reworking of LRRH that is inserted as a subchapter in "The Wolves": "And her mother told her: 'Watch out for the wolf because if he shows up in the forest he'll eat you up.' But Little Red Riding Hood, who was disobedient, replied: 'If the wolf comes after me I'll eat him up.' [. . .] She takes off and on the path she runs into the wolf disguised as a policeman, with his forty-five in hand and if she didn't give him her basket he'd eat her up with bullets" (56). After LRRH stands up to the wolf police and he appears to back down, she continues on her way to her grandmother's. "But the police wolf hid and then he ran off to get that grandmother whore. Now he's knocking at the door of the little old grandmother. 'It's me, Little Red Riding Hood,' with a disguised voice. The grandmother opened the door and the wolf pulled out his forty-five, emptying its magazine: band-bang-bang-bang-bang!" (57). Again, in a later subchapter, LRRH arrives at her grandmother's: "'[It's m]e, Grandmother, let me in, I'm freezing,' and the ferocious wolf puts on slippers in order to give himself a grandmotherly air, wrapped up in a Guatemalan made, Lana Turner woolen blanket. 'A tasty morsel I shall eat,' the bandit-faced wolf thinks, fondling the pistol at his waist just as a precaution. 'Coming, my dear.' The bastard" (69). But the wolves are also Alfonso and his *compañeros,* the underground revolutionary student activists who live in the "forest" operating an antigovernment press. It is not without irony that these rebels are aligned with the wolf of the traditional European tale whose villainous (and conservative) prominence seems to have increased as his actual presence was being radically diminished. Similarly, the relatively disempowered El Salvadoran rebels were demonized by the military and the police in order to intentionally confuse citizens and shift attention away

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from those responsible for real abuses of power, repression, and violence: "you people say we are murderers, but it's just the opposite: We're here to give you anything you want, that's what the students can't stand, they just want to fuck everything up: We're for a revolution with freedom [. . .]" (202).

Nominally and structurally, the novel invokes the classic European fairy tale, making it seem familiar to the broader European and North American audiences. This incorporation should not be read as a cynical commoditization of the form (à la Fredric Jameson), however, but should be seen, in the radicalization of the traditional tale within this new context, as an act of resistance—reworking and subverting the tale and thereby offering alternate systems of meaning which require an active engagement on the part of the reader. At the most general level, the allusions to the classic European tale of Little Red Riding Hood throughout the novel serve as a constant reminder of the long-term penetration of European and U.S. influence in El Salvador which has inextricably entangled itself into daily life as it has simultaneously superimposed a military and political presence. More specifically, the tale of LRRH is set up as a foil; the singularity of its story line is juxtaposed with the endless streams of differing and converging smaller narratives—the *testimonios*—to deflate any claims to the possibility of a "grand narrative." This deconstruction of a single plot or a single point of view reflects the chaos of El Salvador in the late twentieth century, torn apart by military oppression, political instability, economic crisis, and popular revolt. Moreover, events unfold in a cacophony of voices, all intensifying the horrors and anxieties of the time.

Characters in the novel are empowered through voice, not the least the hitherto passive and relatively voiceless character of Little Red Riding Hood herself. Ant as the voice of Woman (here the ultimate "Other") as well as all the other voices of the individual *testimonios* serve as excursions into alterity, providing the novel with some of its most moving and powerful moments. For readers whose knowledge of the conflicts in El Salvador is limited to short and infrequent news casts (surely the most "official" of "official stories"), these testimonials wrench us out of complacency and throw us into the terror of the street.

Little Red Riding Hood in the Red Light District is not an easy read. The rapid non sequiturs in voice, place, and time, coupled with the idiosyncrasies of translated colloquial speech and Argueta's own penchant for wordplays and puns are sometimes frustrating, and often opaque to the English-speaking reader. Rather than suggesting that the novel is not worth reading, however, this difficulty is an indictment of our own narrowness and ethnocentrism in accepting a generic form as the norm or the standard by which all others are judged—the hegemony of the European novel. This claim is given weight by

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the immense popularity of the novel in El Salvador, where it is now in its eighth printing. Stylistics aside, the powerful messages and impassioned voices of the novel are not only abstractly compelling, but shake us into self-reflexivity and into the recognition that ignorance is often complicity.

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Motif-Index of Medieval Spanish Folk Narratives. *By Harriet Goldberg. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 162. Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998. xxviii + 288 pp.*

Written and oral literature have always been closely connected, especially during the Medieval period, when it is hard, not to say impossible, to separate their boundaries. The methodological advances achieved by folklorists may be of some help when analyzing and classifying texts, as long as these tools are used with the appropriate care. While a number of Hispanic medievalists are not making profitable use of these instruments, the situation has recently begun to change, especially thanks to English-speaking critics (we must not forget the pioneering works of Alan Deyermond). Professor Harriet Goldberg, who has been for a long time interested in the relationship between Hispanic Medieval literature and folk tradition, is the most appropriate person to apply the well-known Stith Thompson motif-index principles and format to Medieval Spanish narratives. She has already demonstrated her command of this methodology in the excellent edition of *Esopete ystoriado* (1990), which she published along with Victoria Burrus. The work she now presents is a very useful reference tool which surpasses by far others, such as John Esten Keller's catalogue, *Motif-Index of Spanish Mediaeval Exempla* (1949). The Goldberg study is complemented by the work of Edward J. Neugaard on Catalan narratives (*Motif-Index of Medieval Catalan Folktales* [1994]).

Some of the difficulties Goldberg's task involved are produced by the system's own problems. Many critics have already pointed out the disorder underlying Thompson's apparently rigorous classification, and some of them have even tried to overcome its deficiencies (Anita Guerreau, "Romans de Chrétien de Troyes et contes folkloriques: Rapprochements thématiques et observations du methode," *Romania* 104 [1988]: 1–48; Karin Lichtblau, "Index des motifs narratifs dans la litérature profane allemande des origines à 1400," *Bibliographical Bulletin of International Arthurian Society* 37 [1985]: 312–20). Along similar lines, Goldberg dedicates part of her introduction to methodological problems and goes on to explain the changes she has introduced. What she calls "my specific methodology" basically consists of the addition of new subcategories (P462 Stonecutter, P463 Baker, P464 Shepherd, P465

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